A Declaration to Believers in Christ Concerning the Apostolic Meaning of Ekklesia

by Kevin Elias Hartwell

The present condition of Christianity is marked by visible division in city after city. Denominations, independent fellowships, and countless separate organizations have become so familiar that many believers no longer question whether such a condition reflects the New Testament revelation concerning the church. Yet familiarity does not establish biblical legitimacy. Every generation of believers bears the responsibility of returning to the Scriptures and allowing the apostles themselves to define the meaning of *ekklesia*, the NT Greek word for church.

If Christians knowingly refuse to interpret *ekklesia* according to its New Testament context and instead read later ecclesiastical concepts back into the text, they bear responsibility for perpetuating division rather than pursuing the unity to which the apostles called the churches. The issue is not merely one of preference or tradition but of biblical interpretation. A text without its context becomes a pretext for preserving practices that arose long after the apostolic age.

Throughout the New Testament, the apostles consistently identified churches according to their local expression. We read of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1), the church at Antioch (Acts 13:1), the church of God in Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:2), the church in Ephesus (Revelation 2:1), the church in Philippi (Philippians 1:1), the church of the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 1:1), the church in Cenchrea (Romans 16:1), the churches of Galatia (Galatians 1:2), and the churches throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria (Acts 9:31). Likewise, the Lord Jesus addressed the seven churches in Asia by naming each church according to its city (Revelation 1–3). Whether translations render the locality as "at" or "in," the apostolic pattern remains the same: churches are identified by locality, never by denominational titles, theological parties, or independent organizations.

The apostles appealed for the practical expression of the one Body of Christ within these local churches, condemned divisions, and preserved fellowship among the churches. Paul pleaded that there be no divisions in Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:10–13), reminded the believers, "Now you are the Body of Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:27), and exhorted the saints in Ephesus to keep the oneness of the Spirit, declaring that there is "one Body and one Spirit" (Ephesians 4:3–6). Philippi became Paul's unique partner in the gospel among the churches (Philippians 4:15–16). The Lord Himself prayed that His disciples would be one so that the world might believe (John 17:20–23). The apostolic burden was never to establish competing religious organizations but to manifest the one Body of Christ through practical fellowship among the churches.

Therefore, we call upon every believer, elder, teacher, and church to examine the Scriptures afresh without the controlling influence of inherited traditions, denominational assumptions, or historical systems. Let the New Testament speak for itself. Let *ekklesia* be interpreted according to its historical, grammatical, and contextual usage. Let the apostles define the church rather than later ecclesiastical developments.

This is not a call to sectarianism or another movement. It is a call to repentance wherever human opinion has displaced apostolic revelation, to humility before the Word of God, and to renewed obedience to the faith once for all delivered to the saints. The goal is not organizational uniformity but the practical expression of the oneness of the Body of Christ under the headship of Christ alone.

May every believer possess the discernment of the sons of Issachar, the nobility of the Bereans, and the transparency of genuine fellowship. May the churches once again become living testimonies of Christ in their localities, maintaining fellowship with one another as in the apostolic age. The recovery of biblical church life will never begin through human organization but through submission to the Scriptures and the apostolic revelation wherever it leads.